

Options and Opportunities – Tool #3: Networking

Having great credentials is important when you begin searching for a job, but networking—making professional contacts—is an important way to make personal connections that can assist you in your search. Personal contacts can expand your access to opportunities, particularly those which may not be widely advertised. They can also provide valuable advice and guidance as you go through your search.

General networking tips

**NOTE TO SELF:
CONDUCTING AN
INFORMATIONAL
INTERVIEW IS THE
ULTIMATE NETWORKING
TECHNIQUE.**

Prepare an “elevator” speech

An elevator speech is a 30-second introduction of yourself (about the time you would have to introduce yourself to someone in an elevator). In it, you should briefly mention who you are, what you are doing, and where you hope to go in the future. Include something that will catch and engage the other person’s attention, such as how you became interested in physics or your current research project. Once you have your speech outlined, use it!

Network everywhere

Whether you are at a career fair, physics meeting, department colloquium, or a science outreach event, always look for new people to meet. Every event is a potential networking event. You never know when or where you are going to encounter your next boss. Do not be afraid to tell people that you are looking for a job; most people are eager to help students if they can.

Help others

Networking is about connecting with people—not just furthering your career. When you meet people, think about what you can offer them.

- Can you introduce them to potential collaborators, mentors, or colleagues?
- Provide them with resources or leads that might further their research?
- Offer restaurant recommendations for when they are visiting your area?

This approach makes networking much less intimidating and can help you form meaningful and lasting connections.

Attend physics meetings

Nearly all of the 18 SPS geographic zones host meetings each year, which are a great way to meet peers and faculty members from surrounding schools who might have insight into and connections with the local job market. Many scientific societies, such as the American Physical Society (APS) and American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT), have regional meetings that are a great way to meet scientists and potential employers in your local area.

Most scientific societies host national or international meetings that vary in location annually. When a national meeting is located in close

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proximity to your school, make an effort to attend. For example, APS, AAPT, the American Astronomical Association (AAS), and the Optical Society (OSA) all host meetings with strong undergraduate components, and all have opportunities to meet potential employers. These meetings have opportunities for undergraduates to present work, hear invited speakers, and attend workshops and receptions—all of which are great networking venues. Attend a meeting as an SPS reporter and for some meetings you can get a press pass in addition to earning money for travel, which is a great excuse to introduce yourself to notable scientists. For more information about the SPS Reporter Program, see <http://www.spsnational.org/programs/awards/reporter.htm>.

Get involved!

Attend your department, college, or university professional events. Many colleges and universities host guest speakers and invite scientists to campus events. Make every effort to attend these events and hear the speakers.

Ask questions and introduce yourself after the event. Use these opportunities to **practice your elevator speech**. This gives you a perfect chance to follow up and connect with speakers and other professionals that you meet on LinkedIn or via email.

Ask questions!

One of the simplest ways to start a conversation is by asking, “So, what do you do?” After this, the conversation should progress fluently if you show interest in what the person is telling you. Other questions you might ask new connections include:

- How has your physics background helped you in your career?
- What advice would you give a physics major who wants to go into your field?
- What opportunities does your company have for physics students?
- What do you like most about your career? (or about working for your company?)

Listen carefully, make appropriate comments, and ask intriguing questions. People like to share their stories, so let them do the talking and wait for the invitation to talk about yourself.

Exchange contact information

If you would like to maintain a new connection, don't be afraid to ask someone if you can follow up later by email or phone. Business cards are an easy way to give a new connection your contact information, leave a good impression, and look professional—even if they only say “Physics Student.” When you receive a card from someone else, write a brief description of how you met the person and what you discussed on the back. For example: *APS March Meeting 2014, email about summer research opportunities.*

Network online

Stay in contact with new connections through online networking sites such as LinkedIn. Use key word searches on these sites to find people with your dream job or company and ask your connections to introduce you. Also ask your professors or career services office if they can connect you with alumni in your desired profession via email.

Project a positive attitude

Go into networking events with a positive outlook and be confident in your ability to have a meaningful conversation. Think through your approach and prepare for networking opportunities. Being prepared will help you be more relaxed when you meet new people. Enjoy the opportunity to talk to new people; you never know

when you will meet someone that can connect you to your next job. Have a good sense of humor and an enthusiastic attitude. Get out there, have fun, meet people, and make new connections!

More about the elevator speech

What is an “elevator speech”?...The basics

- The elevator speech is the 30-second version of who you are, what you've accomplished, and where you hope to go in the future. This 30 seconds is your time to highlight your relevant skills, education, and experiences.
- The idea of the elevator speech stems from the length of time you might spend on an elevator with a potential networking contact.
- You should practice your elevator speech several times so that you can easily recall the highlights when an opportunity arises; however, you do not want to sound too rehearsed.
- Think of the elevator speech as a short conversation with a purpose.

What is the point?

Let's say that you are on an elevator or standing in line for coffee at a meeting, and you notice that Nobel laureate John Mather is standing next to you. Maybe his nametag tips you off, or maybe you recognize him from a talk he gave...So, what do you do?

You could:

- A. Get out your cell phone and post on your favorite social media channel that you are standing next to a Nobel laureate.
- B. Create an opportunity for yourself that could influence your future.

Since you are a person of above average intelligence (you are a physics student, after all), A is out of the question and you choose B (or “C. Both A and B”). So, how do you do this?

Give Your Elevator Speech. The elevator speech is the professional way (that you have already rehearsed) to introduce yourself. The goal of the elevator speech is to quickly demonstrate your interest and professionalism in the hopes of engaging the other person in conversation.

Note that you may want to develop a couple of different elevator speeches, each aimed at different audiences. For example, if you are undecided between attending graduate school and starting your career now, have an elevator speech related to both options. You can decide which one to present based on the person standing in front of you. If you plan to present your elevator pitch to someone from a specific organization or company (like a representative at a job fair), be sure to consider what they are seeking in an employee and what you can contribute when you draft that version. Most professionals have several elevator speeches prepared that begin with something like.... “Hello, my name is____ and I am from ____ (company/school).”

Even though you have only a short time span, the elevator speech is an ideal time to share any relevant research and internship or work experience, in addition to any interesting skills or knowledge you have. Think of your elevator speech as a conversation opener that invites the other person to ask for more.

Exercise - Tool #3: Networking Skills – Constructing your elevator speech

⇒ Write down short answers to the following questions. Remember, you want to answer these questions in a coherent way that highlights your potential...in 30 seconds. Stick to the basics. Avoid elaborate embellishments. You can always fill in details if the conversation continues.

Informational facts about you

Who am I? (Be sure to include your name and where you go to school!)

What are one or two relevant, interesting things that I have done recently?

What do I want to do?

⇒ Next, use the data to present yourself. Try arranging the facts in a few different ways until you find one that feels natural and engaging. Write the outline below. Then repeat this process for a more specific type of audience (potential employer, potential informational interviewee, etc.).

General Audience

Outline of my elevator speech (1):

Specific Audience

Outline of my elevator speech (2):

⇒ Practice verbalizing your speech, but don't memorize it word-for-word. You want to be comfortable with the main points but flexible enough to engage in a natural conversation and adapt to the interests or background of the person with whom you are interacting.